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ABSTRACT

A study of K-12 rural school districts enrolling 900 students or fewer in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona used data gathered during the 1981-82 academic year. These data were compared with those from a nationwide survey using the same questionnaire. Qualifying districts were identified: 626 in Texas (56.9% of all Texas public school districts, enrolling 223,704 students), 43 in New Mexico (48.9%, enrolling 16,648 students), and 21 in Arizona (9.8%, enrolling 11,018 students). Questionnaires relating to rural districts, school superintendents, teachers, student performance, and school programs were mailed to superintendents of 816 randomly selected rural districts nationwide and to 124 Texas districts, 23 New Mexico districts, and 5 Arizona districts. Return rates were 78.7% (642 questionnaires) from the nationwide survey, 67.7% (84) from Texas, 73.9% (17) from New Mexico, and 80% (4) from Arizona. Findings indicated that status and conditions of rural American schools differ between geographical regions and within the same region, and that in the Southwest, particularly Texas and New Mexico, rural school districts comprise a sizeable portion of public school districts in the region. Comparisons of the statistical data from the Southwest states with those from the national survey are presented in a 3-page table. (MH)

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RURAL SCHOOLS IN TEXAS, NEW MEXICO, AND ARIZONA

Paper Presented at the Third Annual
Southwestern Conference for Rural Education
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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RURAL SCHOOLS IN TEXAS, NEW MEXICO AND ARIZONA

by

Bruce O. Barker and Ivan D. Muse

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, comparatively few educators have taken an interest in the strengths and challenges of America's small/rural schools, despite the fact that almost one-third of America's youngsters attend schools classified as rural (REA News, 1982). With the decline in school consolidation and the current population shift to non-metropolitan areas (Beal, 1975), it is clearly evident that rural schools will continue to play a significant role in the future educational development of a large segment of our society. Currently, very little data are available about rural school systems in our society. This is particularly true of K-12 systems enrolling less than 1,000 students (Nachtigal, 1979).

The purpose of this report is to present and compare major findings of K-12 rural school districts in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona with those of a nationwide study completed by Barker (1983), in which descriptive data was collected on K-12 and 1-12 rural school systems enrolling 900 students or less. The findings were gathered during the 1982-83 academic year.

METHOD

Using the Education Directory, Fall 1980: Local Education Agencies as a reference, a hand count was made of all K-12 and 1-12 public school districts in the United States which enroll 900 students or less. Of the Nation's 15,601 public districts, 4,125 (26.4 percent) were identified as qualifying K-12 or 1-12 systems. In Texas, 626 qualifying districts were identified. These districts represented 56.9 percent of the state's 1,101

operating public school districts and enrolled 223,704 students. Forty-three qualifying districts were identified in New Mexico which represented 48.9 percent of the state's 88 public school districts and these districts enrolled 16,648 students. A total of 21 qualifying districts were identified in Arizona, or 9.8 percent of the state's 214 districts, and these districts accounted for an enrollment of 11,018 students.

A questionnaire, designed by the researchers and national officers of the Rural Education Association, was mailed to superintendents of 816 randomly selected districts in the nationwide study. Completed questionnaires were returned from 642 districts (78.7 percent), representing 45 different states. The same questionnaire was mailed to 124 districts in Texas, of which 84 responded (67.7 percent); 23 districts in New Mexico, of which 17 responded (73.9 percent); and five in Arizona, of which four responded (80.0 percent).

The questionnaire posed questions related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, student performance, and school programs.

FINDINGS

A comparison of the major findings in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona with those of the national study are reported in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

The status and conditions of schools in rural America differ between geographical regions and even among states within the same region. In the Southwest, particularly in Texas and New Mexico, rural school districts make up a sizeable portion of the public school districts within the region. Certainly, the operation and management of the small/rural district poses

challenges and rewards which are in many ways uniquely different from those of a large urban district and even many larger rural districts. It is hoped that the information presented herein will assist educators in the Southwest, and others interested in education, to more knowledgeably enhance the strengths and address the needs of the region's small/rural districts.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ON K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN TEXAS, NEW MEXICO, ARIZONA, AND THOSE NATIONWIDE, ENROLLING 900 STUDENTS OR LESS. 1983.

Variable	Texas	New Mexico	Arizona	Nationwide
The Rural District				
1. Average student enrollment per district	383	386	572	436
2. Average number of schools per district	2.1	2.4	2.2	2.4
3. Average student enrollment per school	170.1	158.6	239.5	188.5
4. Average geographical size of district in square miles	197	1142	472	245
5. Percent of students bussed to school	54.4	61.6	43.3	64.4
6. Mean farthest one-way distance students are bussed (miles)	20.3	37.5	23.4	19.0
7. Percent of districts reporting receipt of state aid or funding for small districts	54.9	41.2	25.0	24.2
8. Percent of districts reporting passage of most recent bond election	90.1	88.2	100	87.5
9. Average dollar amount of last bond	911,400	318,705	950,000	716,000
10. Percent of districts reporting declining enrollments	15.7	29.4	0	36.2
The Superintendent				
1. Average age of superintendent	47.8	46.9	50.7	47.1
2. Percent of superintendents holding master's as highest college degree	82.5	76.5	100	55.4
3. Percent of superintendents holding Education Specialist as highest college degree	10.0	17.6	0	31.5
4. Percent of superintendents holding doctorate	7.5	5.9	0	13.1
5. Average tenure as superintendent (years)	6.8	5.8	7.3	6.4
6. Percent full-time superintendent	86.9	70.5	50.0	75.8
7. Percent superintendent-principal combination	11.9	17.6	50.0	20.9
8. Percent of superintendents who worked for district prior to appointment as superintendent	39.3	29.4	25.0	29.4
9. Percent of superintendents reporting annual salary in excess of $35,000	53.0	41.2	75.0	37.5

TABLE 1 (continued)

Variable	Texas	New Mexico	Arizona	Nationwide
The Teachers				
1. Average number of elementary teachers per district	13.9	12.1	18.8	14.4
2. Average number of secondary teachers	13.9	14.5	16.0	15.7
3. Average teacher/student ratio	1:14.0	1:14.5	1:16.5	1:14.5
4. Percent teacher turnover (1981-82)	8.3	10.5	7.9	8.6
5. Mean beginning teacher salary	$11,948	$15,478	$12,864	$12,492
6. Mean top teacher salary	$21,774	$24,327	$24,571	$20,506
7. Mean current teacher salary	$16,070	$20,429	$18,301	$16,377
8. Average number of "steps" to reach top of salary schedule	16.4	17.0	17.3	14.5
9. Average number of different subject preparations	3.3	5.3	3.3	3.5
Student Performance				
1. Mean number of graduating seniors	27.3	26.0	32.5	34.5
2. Percent of graduating seniors recognized as National Merit Exam finalists	0.5	0	0	1.0
3. Percent of graduating seniors scoring 25+ on American College Test (ACT Exam)	9.2	4.5	3.1	7.5
4. Percent of graduating seniors scoring 1100+ on Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT Exam)	5.3	2.5	0	2.6
5. Percent of graduating seniors going on to college	37.7	36.7	31.3	38.6
6. Percent of graduating seniors going on to technical school	6.9	13.0	5.0	14.1
School Programs				
1. Percent of districts employing either full or part-time, the following resource personnel:				
Special Education	86.4	94.1	100	86.6
School Counselor	72.8	94.1	50.0	79.4
School Psychologist	9.9	0	50.0	33.8
School Nurse	67.9	52.9	75.0	45.1
Librarian/Media Specialist	75.3	82.3	75.0	80.9

TABLE 1 (continued)

Variable	Texas	New Mexico	Arizona	Nationwide
Resource Personnel (continued)				
Adult Education Director	6.2	0	0	22.0
Community Education Director	2.4	0	0	7.8
Vocational Education Director	14.8	0	25.0	22.0
2. Percent of districts offering the following sports programs:				
Football	69.5	76.5	100	69.2
Basketball	100	100	100	100
Baseball	43.9	17.6	100	55.4
Softball	13.4	5.9	100	37.1
Volleyball	45.1	82.4	75.0	65.7
Cross Country Running	3.7	5.8	0	23.3
Soccer	1.2	0	0	7.0
Wrestling	1.2	0	25.0	25.2
Track and Field	96.3	94.1	100	78.7
Golf	40.2	5.9	0	22.4
Tennis	70.7	5.9	25.0	16.3
Swimming	2.4	5.9	0	3.2
Gymnastics	4.8	5.9	0	5.9
3. Percent of districts offering the following courses as a part of their curriculum:				
Spanish	47.4	11.8	100	41.8
German	0	11.8	0	9.7
French	1.3	11.8	0	18.9
Calculus	22.4	11.8	50.0	35.9
Chemistry	69.7	11.8	75.0	79.4
Computer Science	28.9	47.1	75.0	60.3
Electronics	2.6	0	0	13.0
Vocational Agriculture	90.8	70.6	50.0	63.1
Physics	50.0	41.2	50.0	67.7

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